



### FAQs: Contact Tracing & Exposure in School Settings

**Q:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that students can sit 3 feet apart in a classroom. My school is implementing this guidance, but now my student is considered a close contact during contact tracing when they are sitting 3 feet apart. Why is my student still a close contact based on this new CDC guidance?

**A:** The CDC has issued this guidance based on studies that show transmission in classroom settings has been relatively low; however, the way the coronavirus is transmitted has not changed and there is still risk. CDC made this recommendation because they felt that the benefit of in-person learning outweighed the risk of negative effects due to quarantine. When contact tracing is done, anyone who was within 6 feet of a COVID-19 case for 15 cumulative minutes or more in a 24-hour period is still recommended to quarantine. Several quarantine options exist, but please defer to your school on which option(s) they are allowing.

**Q:** Has the CDC updated distancing guidance for other school settings like cafeterias, buses, or recess?

**A:** No, the only place that CDC has changed guidance related to social distancing is within a traditional classroom setting. The traditional classroom setting is defined as a classroom where all students are seated in desks facing the same way and the teacher is at the front of the classroom. For other scenarios, like the cafeteria, bus, and recess, students should remain 6 feet apart whenever possible. Other classes that 6 feet of distancing would still be recommended include band, choir, and gym.

**Q:** Does the new 3 feet rule apply to students and teachers or just students?

**A:** The new 3 feet rule applies only to students. It is still recommended that teachers and staff remain 6 feet apart from each other and from students.

**Q:** Transmission in our county is high, is it still okay for students to sit 3 feet apart in the classroom?

**A:** The new guidance allows *elementary school students* to sit 3 feet apart when mask use is universal\* no matter how high transmission is in the community. Middle and high school students should continue to maintain 6 feet of distance in areas where the transmission in the community is high. All grade levels can sit 3 feet apart when mask use is universal\* in areas where transmission is low, moderate, or substantial.

**Q:** My school is in an area of high transmission. Our elementary school is maintaining 3 feet of distance in classrooms, but our middle and high school students maintain 6 feet of distance in the classrooms. Why is the recommendation for elementary schools versus middle and high schools different in areas of high transmission?

**A:** This recommendation is different due to how the virus is transmitted in different age groups. According to existing knowledge about COVID-19, older students are more likely to be exposed and spread the virus compared to younger students. This doesn't mean the risk for younger students is nonexistent, but is lower than for the older students and adults.

**Q:** My school is using the 3 feet of distance in the classroom and during this time all students and staff wear masks. Why does masking need to be done throughout the entire facility, not just in the classroom when they are 3 feet apart?

**A:** Universal mask wearing\* is an important part of slowing transmission of COVID-19. Evidence indicates that wearing masks consistently and appropriately (covering the nose and mouth completely without gaping) can reduce the spread of COVID-19. There are many places throughout the school where 6 feet of distancing cannot always be maintained, but universal masking\* can be maintained helping lower risk of transmission.

\*Universal masking is defined as all parties wearing masks properly, over the nose and mouth, throughout the facility.

**Resources:**

[CDC: K-12 School Operational Strategy](#)

[Central District Health: Physical Distancing in Classrooms](#)

[Central District Health: K-12 School Quarantine](#)

[Central District Health: Quarantine Guidance](#)